

SHAW, (A)

at

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IN ENGLAND.*

An Interview with ALBERT SHAW, Ph. D., of Minneapolis, published in the
Pall Mall Gazette, November 24 and 27, 1888.

It will interest the subscribers to the Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science to learn that Albert Shaw, one of the editors of the *Minneapolis Tribune*, who took his doctor's degree in Baltimore in 1884 and who has made various contributions to historical and economic literature, is now studying English Institutions upon English ground. Besides closely observing English politics and methods of administration under the very best auspices in London, he has found time to examine the practical workings of Municipal Government in various parts of the United Kingdom. Some of the results of his comparative study of English municipalities are given in an "Interview" recently sought by the *Pall Mall Gazette* and published in two successive numbers of that journal, November 24 and 27, 1888. Dr. Shaw's remarks will perhaps be interesting and suggestive to a wide circle of readers in America, where popular interest in problems of municipal government is steadily increasing.—EDITOR.

"MR. ALBERT SHAW, an American editor from Minneapolis, has been in this country for the last few months studying British institutions. During his stay here Mr. Shaw has contributed an article to the *Contemporary Review* and presented several volumes on co-operation (on which he has bestowed considerable study in America) to the library at Toynbee Hall. A topic which has occupied much of his attention during his sojourn with us has been the nature and working of British municipal institutions. He

* It is proposed to issue from time to time (in connection with the Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science) *Notes* on current topics of interest. This number of the *Notes* is issued in special connection with the papers on Municipal Government that are appearing in the *Studies*. Monographs on the City Governments of Philadelphia, Boston, St. Louis, Washington, New Haven, San Francisco, and New Orleans have been already issued or are now ready.

presented by the author



has visited Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, making a minute and comprehensive study of the last-named city. The results of his examination he has embodied in an elaborate article, which will appear in the *Political Science Quarterly*, and it is probable that other articles from his pen will appear in other American magazines, which will enable our kinsmen across the sea the better to understand the true inwardness of a British municipality. Before Mr. Shaw left for Germany he was kind enough to communicate to a representative of the *Pall Mall Gazette* some account of the general impression which he has formed of our municipalities:—

“One thing,” said Mr. Shaw, ‘which impressed me immensely, is that civilization in the English towns may be said to be no more than twenty years old; nearly everything that has been done in the shape of civilizing and improving your towns has been begun and carried through in the last twenty years. The result, however, is most gratifying. I confess that I was utterly unprepared from my American experience to find anything approaching the perfect and elaborate system of local government which prevails in your cities.’

THE SUPERIORITY OF OUR MUNICIPAL SYSTEM.

“In what respect is it better than your American system?”

“In three things; it is simpler, it is more efficient, and there is much more trust shown in the people. For instance, to begin at the beginning, the simplicity of your system. A British municipality is one of the simplest forms of democracy. All your householders elect your council; a certain proportion of aldermen are elected, and this is the governing body of the town. The mayor, who is elected annually, is the creature of the council, and simply the ornamental head or temporary chairman of the local governing body. With us we have a far more complicated system; our municipal body has very restricted authority, neither does it elect the mayor, who is the executive. The mayor is elected by *plébiscite* of the citizens, and stands in no organic relation to the municipal assembly, his position being analogous to that of the President and the State Governors. That, however, is not all. The municipality is itself subject to the State Legislature to such an extent that whenever any important subject comes up it is the habit of the Legislature to appoint a Special Commission to relieve the municipal body of all duties and responsibilities relating thereto. In many cities, for instance, at the present time, the ordinary police administration is in the hands of Commissions appointed by the State governments, and various other interferences restrict and dissipate municipal responsibility. So much for simplicity. Secondly, as to efficiency. In America the local authority, not having the same large range of power which belongs to your municipalities, does not attract to itself the best kind of men. Second and third rate men, many of whom are not free from suspicion of corruption, are elected, the more influential citizens feeling that it

pays them better to submit to a little cheating and slovenliness in local administration rather than waste valuable time in looking after the small share of local business which falls to a member of the municipal body. Then again many of our municipalities are dominated by the liquor question. Elections turn solely upon high licence or low licence, prohibition or regulation. In presence of these issues very few people think of administrative efficiency. Then, again, it is very seldom that we maintain our officials for so many years in office as is the case here. It is not at all unusual to find a British municipal officer with fifty years' experience behind him. Thirdly, there is much more power entrusted to your municipalities than is the case with us. I have seen nothing like Glasgow, for instance, in the whole of the United States. The extent and multiplicity of the powers vested in your corporation, the absolute freedom from any outside influences possessed by your municipalities, have no counterpart on our side of the Atlantic; with you the municipal Home Rule is carried to much greater lengths than it is with us.'

GLASGOW AN IDEAL MUNICIPALITY.

"'You were much impressed with Glasgow?'

"'Immensely impressed. It was a little world to itself. I had not expected to find in an English-speaking country so perfect an example of civic administration. The whole people through their elected representatives look after the affairs of the whole of the community with an ability and a vigilance and a public spirit that are simply admirable.'

"'I am delighted to hear it. Then do you think Glasgow an ideal city?'

"'By no means; but there are very few cities which I have visited where there seem to be so many of the very poor living in such densely-populated slums. In some districts of Glasgow there are as many as 1,000 persons per acre, and the death-rate in consequence is still very high.'

"'Wherein, then, lies the excellence of Glasgow?'

"'In the energy with which the citizens, having at last wakened to a sense of the evils around them, have set themselves to abate those evils. The perfection of municipal machinery represents continuous and persistent effort to undo the evil which a long period of *laissez faire* and indifference had allowed to spring up. That, indeed, is a very general phenomenon, and I think may explain much of what seems the very rapid growth of Socialism in the modern State. If the authorities had interfered but a little more in time there would have been much less need for their interfering as much as they have to do now, when they are driven to interfere to a great extent merely in order to counteract the neglected work of the past. Take, for instance, the overcrowding of Glasgow. When the Irish crossed from Ireland, and the Highlanders descended from the hills, attracted by the industries of Glasgow, they were allowed to be housed pretty much as they pleased. Vast buildings were run up like human warrens above ground, in which the necessary securities for light and air were not provided, and the

consequence was that there grew up in Glasgow a series of slums with which you have nothing in London to compare, for in London you have plenty of room and to spare in comparison with the people of Glasgow. The vast majority of the families of Glasgow live in one-room or two-room tenements. Owing to the neglect of the local sanitary authority to enforce the necessary conditions as to healthy existence, when the population thickened, the city council has had to enter upon very extensive operations for relieving the congested districts, in the houses of which scores of thousands of persons were pigged together. They have been pulled down now, and the inhabitants scattered in different directions.'

HOW THE TOWN TAKES THOUGHT FOR THE POOR.

"'What impressed you most in Glasgow?"'

"'The extraordinary care that was taken by the authorities to look after the interest of the poorer classes. It was quite wonderful, and without any precedent in my American experience.'

"'Give me an instance.'

"'Oh, take this, for instance. It is only a small thing, but it is typical of much. Most of the population of Glasgow living in the rooms of tenemented buildings, they enter them by passages and corridors which are often of very considerable extent. All these staircases and corridors within tenemented property are lighted by the City corporation just as they light the public streets. Part of this is recouped to the town by a charge to the owners of the property, but the lighting of these passages and staircases and corridors is recognized as part of the public duty of a public authority. The advantages are enormous. A gas-lamp is worth a policeman any day, and it is true economy and sound policy which have led to this extension of the lighting area of the town. Another admirable institution of Glasgow are the municipal lodging-houses. These will accommodate some thousands of men and women every night. Each person has a separate room and the use of a common room in which he can read and play draughts or chess, and of a kitchen in which he can cook whatever he likes as he likes for the sum of 4d. per day! It can be done at that figure and a profit made out of it, the proof of which is that one of the superintendents of the municipal lodging-houses started a similar lodging-house of his own as a private venture in which he accommodates 600 persons nightly. Take another instance. The public washhouses in Glasgow are of simply unexampled excellence. They are all the property of the corporation, and established for the use of the people. Any workman's wife can take the dirty linen of the household to the public laundry, and for the charge of 2d. an hour can secure the use of a small apartment, with hot and cold water laid on, with a boiler in which her washing can be boiled by steam. She must supply her own soap, but after she has washed the clothes all the moisture is removed from them by a patent wringer, and then they are thoroughly dried in a hot-air chamber. After that they are ironed by being passed through heated steel rollers and

can be taken home, cleaned, and done up in less than an hour after entering the laundry to do a week's washing for 2d. This is a convenience which must be seen to be believed. Another excellent institution attached to the laundry is the public bath. Admirable swimming baths for both men and women exist, in which the clear Loch Katrine water is maintained at the right temperature, and in these you can swim as long as you like for 2d. But I might go on for an hour describing all the arrangements that are made for the convenience and health of the community.'

"'But,' said our representative, 'they have no free library in Glasgow?'

"'No; the ratepayer is poor, and although there have been repeated attempts to secure the adoption of the Free Libraries Act they have hitherto failed. There is, however, a free library in Glasgow, a very remarkable one, called after the name of its founder, Mr. Mitchell. He left £75,000 to establish a free library and reading-room, and the institution is one of the most popular and useful in the city. The reading-room is one of the best I have seen in Great Britain. All the best current literature of America as well as Great Britain is found on its tables, and I found it crowded whenever I entered, mostly by working people. The library is only for reference, no one being allowed to take a book home, but the contents of its shelves are in constant request.'

A MODEL FREE HOSPITAL.

"Against the failure to adopt the Libraries Act you should put the extraordinary scale and admirable arrangement of the hospital for infectious diseases. An estate of thirty acres was purchased by the town outside the city. The mansion-house was converted into a place of residence for the nurses and the doctors. There are some seventy or eighty nurses, most of them ladies of good family, each of whom has her own apartment. The hospital is on the pavilion principle, and there are some seventeen or eighteen double pavilions, scattered at intervals all over the estate. The place looks like a small village. Everything is in apple-pie order, and as clean and comfortable as care and money can make it. Accommodation is adequate for a thousand patients, and if anybody in Glasgow falls ill of an infectious disease, whether he be a rich man or a poor man, he is packed off at once to the hospital, where he is much better cared for than he could be in his own house, and completely isolated, so as to reduce the danger of the spread of an epidemic to a minimum. In connection with this hospital there is a sanitary laundry, where the municipal authorities maintain a staff which undertakes the disinfection of all articles that have come into contact with cases of infectious disease. The hospital, I may say, is entirely free. If your child in Glasgow takes scarlet-fever, the town takes the whole charge of feeding, lodging, and doctoring that child for six weeks at least. But the whole sanitary service of Glasgow is admirable, and few sanitary chiefs have impressed me more favourably than Dr. Russell and Mr. Fyfe, who are the responsible heads of the health service of the city. The city

is divided into wards or districts, over each of which there is an inspector, who is responsible for the sanitary oversight of the population under his care. Tenemented houses are visited regularly by lady visitors, who are maintained as part of the corporation staff. The whole system goes like clockwork, and the result is that notwithstanding the immense overcrowding, and the one-room system of a large part of the population, the authorities are perfectly competent to cope with an epidemic and to keep it within very narrow bounds.'

THE DREDGER AND THE DRAINS.

““Is the drainage of the city good?”

““No; there again we have to face the consequence of long-continued neglect. Nothing can be more primitive than the drainage of Glasgow. The drains run straight from the houses and the streets into the Clyde, and empty themselves into the river close to the bridges and wharves of Glasgow. The result is that dredging is constantly carried on in order to clear the bed of the river of the sludge, which otherwise would choke it up. The banks are so foul and the odour is so offensive, that a stroll along the quays and down the stream is a very disagreeable experience. It has not been demonstrated that disease results from this nauseating condition of the river, yet it would certainly seem a dangerous nuisance. This primitive system is, however, doomed. Two large intercepting sewers, one on each side of the river, will be laid down before long, running parallel to the river by which the sewage will be conveyed to a considerable distance down the Clyde, where it will be more or less purified, the effluent run off into the tidal river, and the sludge barged out to sea. Sewage works of an elaborate sort will have to be undertaken by Manchester, owing to the making of the Ship Canal. At present the sewage is carried off by the river which runs through the city, but as that river is to be utilized for other purposes, they are preparing to erect a sewage-filtration works on a very large scale. The sewage farm and filtration works at Birmingham seem to me the most perfect of the kind that I have seen. Manchester takes the palm for the rapidity and efficiency with which refuse and garbage are cleared away from the streets.”

CHEAP TRAMS.

““But to return to Glasgow; have they made much progress in the way of municipal Socialism?”—“That depends upon your definition of Socialism. The arrangement by which the tramways of Glasgow are worked is very interesting and suggestive. The line was laid down by the corporation and leased to a company under an arrangement by which the company had to pay interest and sinking fund on the capital expended by the corporation in laying down the tramway, so that by the time the lease expires they will have repaid the whole cost of the construction as well as the interest upon the amount expended. They also have to pay a rental of £150 a mile per annum and to relay the line at the conclusion of their lease, so that they will hand it over to the corporation in a better condition than it was when

they entered upon it, for the steel rails (which they are to put down) will replace iron ones. Not only is the tramway company thus put under onerous obligations to the community which leases out the use of its streets, but the interests of the working classes are protected by a series of maximum fares which the tramway company is not allowed to exceed. The fares are very cheap. The distances are not great, and the penny fare is the rule, but it is stipulated that for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, when work-people are going to and from their work, they shall be carried at a halfpenny?

“But how, in the name of wonder, does the tramway company survive under such conditions?”

“It not only survives, but pays an average dividend of 10 per cent., besides providing for the sinking fund to defray £150,000 bonus which they paid to the original lessees to secure possession of the lease. Herein it seems to me that Glasgow teaches the cities in England and America a lesson, for they have literally chucked away, as if it were not worth having, the right to use the streets, on which they might have raised a very handsome revenue, although I could name a number of interesting and creditable exceptions in England.”

THE MONOPOLIES OF SERVICE.

“I suppose Glasgow owns its gas and water?”

“Certainly; and so ought every municipality. All the monopolies of service, such as gas, water, trams, and the like, should belong to the community, and experience has shown that they can be administered with quite as much freedom from assumption as when they were left in the hands of private adventurers. The great difficulty of municipal finance hitherto has been that it has relied far too much upon rates, and a rate is always an unpopular means of raising money. If, on the other hand, the community kept the monopolies of service in its own hands it would be able in many cases ultimately to raise a magnificent revenue without laying on a rate at all.”

“Did you find much trace of a tendency to municipalize the land in Englishmen?”

“No, very little. That is a question of the future, not of the present.”

“How many people do you think that the Glasgow corporation employ?”

“I would hesitate at answering that question; but if you reckon those who are employed by contractors who are doing work for the corporation, those who are employed upon the Clyde Navigation Trust (which is practically a branch of the municipal administration of Glasgow, although other bodies are joined with it), you will find that there must be upwards of 10,000 persons constantly employed in the service of the City. I would not like to pin myself to those figures, but they are not far out.”

THE MORAL OF IT ALL.

“Then on the whole, Mr. Shaw, you are satisfied with our municipal institutions?”

“More than satisfied—I am delighted; and I think the experience of Glasgow is full of lessons for our new communities that are springing up all over the United States.”

“What lessons do you deduce from it?”

“First, simplify your administration; secondly, trust the people; thirdly, give the municipality plenty to do, so as to bring the best men to the work; fourthly, keep all the monopolies of service in the hands of the municipality, regard the supply of gas and water and the letting of the use of the streets to tramway companies as very promising sources of revenue; and lastly, use the authority and the influence of the municipality in order to secure for the poorest advantages in the shape of cheap trams, healthy and clean lodging, baths, washhouses, hospitals, reading-rooms, &c., to such extent, at least, as in a given case private enterprise shows itself inadequate to do what the welfare of the community requires should be done. I say this with no ardent bias towards socialism and with due regard for the financial aspects of these questions.”

Mr. Shaw's doctor's dissertation at the Johns Hopkins University was upon the subject of “Etienne Cabet and the Icarian Community,” since embodied in “Icaria,” Putnam, New York, 1884, afterwards translated and published in German, Stuttgart, 1886. Dr. Shaw's first contribution to the *Studies* was in January, 1883, when his “Local Government in Illinois” was reprinted from the *Fortnightly Review*, where it first appeared October 1, 1882, under the title of “Local Government in America.” At the request of Mr. James Bryce, Dr. Shaw prepared for the *Contemporary Review*, May, 1887, the article on “The American State and the American Man,” designed to show the actual facts with regard to the extent of government interference in American economic life. He is the author of a very interesting monograph upon “Coöperation in the Northwest” in the “History of Coöperation in the United States,” Baltimore, 1888. More recently, Dr. Shaw has edited a volume of papers by American economists upon “The National Revenues,” Chicago, A. C. McClurg & Co., 1888.

Since visiting England Dr. Shaw has contributed a valuable paper upon “The American Tariff” to the *Contemporary Review*, November, 1888. He has made a careful study of the educational work of Toynbee Hall, or the Universities' Settlement at Whitechapel in East London, described by Mr. Montague and Mr. Gell in the *Studies* for January, 1889.

—EDITOR.

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